

## **A PORTRAYAL OF NIGERIAN AFTER CIVIL WAR IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *CIVIL PEACE* (1971)**

**Anjar Dwi Astuti**

Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris  
Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Mulawarman  
Jalan Harmonika Nomor 1, Samarinda, Kalimantan Timur  
Pos-el: [anjardwi.010@gmail.com](mailto:anjardwi.010@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

African literature has strong relation with colonialism, not only because they had ever been colonized but also because of civil war. *Civil Peace* (1971), a short story written by Chinua Achebe, tells about how Nigerian survive and have to struggle to live after Nigerian Civil War. It is about the effects of the war on the people, and the “civil peace” that followed. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War, 6 July 1967–15 January 1970, was a political conflict caused by the attempted annexation of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria. Knowing the relation between the story and the Nigerian Civil War, it is assured that there is a history depicted in *Civil Peace*. In this article, the writer portrays the history and the phenomenon of colonization in Nigeria by using new historical and postcolonial criticism approaches.

**Keywords:** *history, colonization, civil war*

### **ABSTRAK**

Karya sastra Afrika memiliki hubungan yang kuat dengan kolonialisme. Hal tersebut bukan hanya karena Afrika pernah dijajah oleh bangsa lain tetapi juga karena terjadinya perang saudara. *Civil Peace* (1971), sebuah cerpen yang ditulis oleh Chinua Achebe, menceritakan tentang bagaimana orang-orang Nigeria korban perang saudara yang selamat dan kemudian berusaha berjuang untuk bertahan dan melanjutkan hidup se usai perang. Cerpen ini juga menceritakan efek dari perang saudara untuk mereka dan “civil peace” (perdamaian untuk orang biasa (sipil) yang mengikutinya. Perang Saudara di Nigeria dikenal dengan Perang *Biafran* yang terjadi pada 6 Juli 1967 sampai dengan 15 Januari 1970. Konflik politik yang terjadi disebabkan oleh perluasan kekuasaan Provinsi Nigeria Tenggara yang secara sepihak memproklamkan diri sebagai bagian dari Republik Biafra. Konflik tersebut merupakan akibat dari tekanan pada faktor ekonomi, kesukuan, budaya dan agama diantara suku-suku yang ada di Nigeria.

Dengan mengetahui hubungan antara cerita dalam cerpen *Civil Peace* dan Perang Saudara di Nigeria, dipastikan bahwa ada sejarah yang dipaparkan dalam cerpen ini. Artikel ini menganalisa bagaimana penulis menggambarkan sejarah and fenomena penjajahan di Nigeria dengan menggunakan *new historical* dan poskolonial kritik.

**Kata kunci:** sejarah, penjajahan, perang saudara

## A. INTRODUCTION

Chinua Achebe, poet and novelist, is one of the most important African writers. He is also considered one of the most original literary artists currently writing in English. Although Achebe writes in English, he attempts to incorporate Igbo vocabulary and narratives. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was his first novel. It has been translated into at least forty-five languages, and has sold eight million copies worldwide.

One of his works that will be discussed is a short story with the title *Civil Peace*. It is interesting to be analyzed because it tells about how people survive and have to struggle to live after war and the setting is Nigeria, one of African countries. This story is about the effects of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) on the people, and the “civil peace” that followed. *Civil Peace* which first appeared in print in 1971 takes place in the immediate post-war period. Focusing not on the hardships and destruction of the war but on the new opportunities to rebuild, the story has struck many critics for its optimism and positive outlook. Weber (2010) states *Civil Peace* insidiously demonstrates the similarities between Nigeria during the war and after the war; during both periods, violence and corruption can emerge at any time.

Reading the *Civil Peace*, it is a story with a “flat” plot. Since the narration is more to inform the reader rather than to narrate the story. Moreover, Africans have strong relation with colonization, not only because they had ever been colonized but they also have their own war. Based on that reason, it is interesting to analyze the story. *Civil Peace*, it is about Nigerian Civil War. The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War. It was happened on 6 July 1967 until 15 January 1970. Political conflict occurred because of the attempted annexation of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra (Atofarati, 1992). The conflict was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria (Weber, 2010).

Considering the story and its background, this study aims to dig out how the writer portrays the history and the phenomenon of colonization in Nigeria. Knowing the relation between the story and the Nigerian Civil War, it assured that

history is depicted in *Civil Peace*. Atofarati (1992) supports with the History of Nigeria as a state:

The building of Nigeria as a multi - national state began in 1900 with the creation of Northern and Southern Protectorates along with the colony of Lagos by the British government. Further effort at unification and integration was made in May 1906 when the colony of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which had existed separately, were amalgamated to become the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (Atofarati, 1992).

The influence of British colonization also became part of the development of Nigeria. The idea to build one nation came from British colonization that arranged the region into certain part for the importance of colonization. Therefore, this study applies new historical and postcolonial criticisms. New historical is being chosen because this story tells about the history of Nigeria based on the condition of people in Nigeria after war. New historicism can be seen as reflection of many histories that build by the marginal and ordinary people who are not written in History. Then, postcolonial criticism is used to analyze the phenomenon of colonization that depicted inside the story. The writer of this short story, Chinua Achebe, becomes the important person who provides the information through the story.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

New Historical criticism is based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic (Barry, 1995). A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts color that critic's conclusions. Then postcolonial criticism seeks to understand the operations—politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically—of colonialist and anticolonialist ideology (Tyson, 2006:418). The chief concern of African Literature of the 1950 is its focus on the destabilizing effect of European colonialism on African Society (Hussain, 2010).

## **C. METHOD**

Achebe's *Civil Peace* addresses life after Civil War in Nigeria. It tells about the effects of the Nigerian Civil War on the people and the "civil peace" that followed. This study employs library research. *Civil Peace* short story written by

Chinua Achebe becomes the primary data. The secondary data are taken from books and articles discussing and analyzing Chinua Achebe's works and the history of Nigeria. New historical and postcolonial criticism are used to analyze *history* and to reveal the colonization phenomenon which is portrayed by Achebe in *Civil Peace*.

#### D. DISCUSSION

Literature is not only about written text which is written beautifully and also meaningfully, but can be a reflection of wider social context. *Civil Peace* can be understood as part of the history of Nigerian. Here, history is told from the ordinary people who felt and lived in Nigeria Civil War. *Civil Peace* starts off in eastern Nigeria after the civil war has ended. Jonathan Iwegbu considers himself and his family lucky. He, his wife, and three of their four children are alive. He even was able to keep his bike which he turns into a taxi to make money. In two weeks he made 115 pounds. Jonathan then travels to Enugu to search for his home, and to his surprise it is still standing when other structures around it are demolished. The house needs some repairs so Jonathan finds some supplies around and hires a carpenter to fix his house. He then moves his family back in. The entire family works hard to earn money and rebuild their lives. The children pick mangoes and his wife, Maria, makes *akara* balls to sell. After finding that his job as a miner isn't a possibility he decides to open a bar for soldiers that is run out of his house. Then the night after Jonathan gets an egg-rashing (20 pounds because the government changed the currency) a large group of robbers show up at his house demanding 100 pounds. When Jonathan replies that he doesn't have that much money, the robbers break in and take the 20 pounds anyways. After they take the money life goes on as usual for Jonathan.

The beginning of the story is a sigh of relief. It is a relief because the war is over and Jonathan Iwegbu's family is safe. It details how they get back on their feet after this dreadful war. The Nigerian civil war, popularly known all over the world as the "Biafran War" was fought from 1967 until 1970 (Atofarati, 1992). The war was between the Eastern Region of Nigeria and the rest of the country. The Eastern Region declared itself an independent state which was regarded as an act of secession by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. The war was fought to reunify the country. It was the culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued the Nation from independence in 1960.

##### 1. History "Speaks" Through New Historical Criticism on *Civil Peace*

History captures in *Civil Peace* when people as the victim of the Civil War speak and tell their condition after the war. Jonathan Iwegbu is one of them. He is

a happy survival because he still gathers with his family and has a bike that helps him to get money for living. It tells not only about the material owner but also the spirit to work hard also represented by Iwegbu's family. Maria, the wife, makes akara and sells it to give income. The children pick mangoes and sell them to soldiers' wife and they can get a few pennies.

The suffering after war and people as the victim has captured in a positive way by Achebe. The optimism to face the future after war, the ruin because of war, will not be the end of people life, as long as they want to struggle towards their condition. *History* does not speak much about this people condition, but *history* is depicted in *Civil Peace* explain it from the ordinary people point of view. The story tells *history* with non-capital letter *h*, which is different with *History* with capital letter *H* because new historicism can be seen as reflection of many histories that build by the marginal and ordinary people which are not written (Bertens, 2008:141). It shows the intelligent author, Chinua Achebe whose provides different point of view on seeing the life after Civil War. Nigeria has special enemy, because the enemy is actually their own brother nation, the same citizen of Nigeria but with different tribes.

Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 but has since been plagued by unequal distribution of wealth and ineffective, often corrupt governments. Chinua Achebe as one of the Nigerian writer, believe in literature's social and political importance and have made use of literature to reform the society and bring Nigeria back to normalcy. Achebe is one of the outstanding West African Anglophone writers who have endeavored to present an authentic and verifiable picture of Africa along with its cultural past (Hussain, 2010). He virtually is at the top of the list of those citizens who have written about Nigeria's inherent anarchy and its colonial trauma, its independence from former imperial powers and the distressing aftermath of their independence leading to the present chaos haunting their societies.

*Civil Peace* reflects Achebe's point of view and live experience after civil war. The robbery as the climax of the story represents the new enemy after Civil War. Economic factor forces people to do robbery as the form of violence that they should face off after war's violence. The enemy is not soldiers with weapon to build independence country but common people that use weapon to fulfill their needs. This phenomenon cannot be separated from the historical background of Nigeria. The influence of colonization gives continuation effect on Nigerian society. The Civil War cannot be separated also from the history of Nigeria colonization. Tribes diversity that forced by the British colonizer for becoming one nation with region arrangement based on economic consideration did not create unity between them, but provoked them to fight against their own brothers as citizen of one nation.

In order to bring to light the political dimension of literary texts, new historicist often read them in connection with non-literary texts and with reference to the dominant discourse or discourses of a given period (Bertens, 2008: 152). In *Civil Peace* the dominant discourse is after the Nigerian Civil War, which becomes the basic of the explanation above as the application of new historicism approach. Non-literary texts that have connection with Nigerian Civil War taken from biography and also articles which explain about the history of Nigeria. The relation can be seen clearly because the short story was published in 1971 and the Civil War ended in 1970.

The setting of place, Enugu also becomes important place that convince readers that it is part of the history of Nigerian war. Enugu became the bastion of secession and rebellion and the Federal Government of Nigeria expected that its capture would mean the end of secession. By the 4th October 1967, Enugu was captured and with this capture 1 Infantry Division took time to refit and reorganize (Atofarati, 1992). The division had the impression belief that the fall of Enugu would automatically mean the collapse of the rebellion.

In *Civil Peace*, Jonathan Iwegbu made the journey to Enugu and found his house still standing. Then, he decided to return to Enugu and began his life with his family. They struggle to build everything in their life after war with hard work. This place also introduced them with the others enemy, the robber. Enugu becomes the symbol of the ending of rebellion. Through the struggle of Iwegbu family, Enugu is also the symbol of optimistic life after war. However, new rebels are, they are people that want to pursue their needs to live after war. This is how *Civil Peace* tells *history*, as Bertens states that new historicism can be seen as reflection of many histories that build by the ordinary people which are not written (2008:152) in *History*.

*Civil Peace* wants to show that after the Civil War they need civil peace. Achebe's narration explains that history gives big influence in the development of his country. History which began with colonization era then developed into independent country that related to history with its social context. The power of the colonizer to govern Nigeria in the early colonization creates the boundary of each tribe which then provoked the Civil War between Northern and Southern Nigeria. The majority tribe becomes the one who held the power after colonization era. The peace that firstly Nigerian wanted to pursue from British Empire then moved into peace from their own brothers who come from different tribes. Here, new historical criticism explore that literary criticism begins to see literature as an integral part of a much wider cultural context. Achebe's believe that literature:

Achebe believes that literature has social and political importance and to him it is much more than a creative ornament. It provides a necessary critical, perspective on everyday experience, educates people on the meaning of their actions and offers them greater control over their social and personal lives. Achebe work commands a wide international audience (Hussain, 2010).

Many of his works deal with the social and political problems facing his country. Hussain (2010) states Achebe's works have chronological and historical perspectives. Achebe also became part of the Nigerian Civil War; he was an eyewitness of that war. Achebe left his career in radio in 1966, during the national unrest and violence that led to the Biafran War (Weber, 2010). Thus, *Civil Peace* provides history based on everyday experience of ordinary people that rich in meaning and deep critical perspective.

## 2. The Colonized “Speak” Through Postcolonial Criticism on *Civil Peace*

The chief concern of African Literature of the 1950 is its focus on the destabilizing effect of European colonialism on African Society (Hussain, 2010). The blend of two cultures gave birth to a new psychology that often did not go along with the traditional surroundings (Hussain, 2010). Achebe reflected on the imposition of western values on traditional and tribal Africa and examined the new conflict that accompanied the colonial rule.

During in Williams states that “In both literature and politics the post-colonial drive towards identity centers around language... For the post-colonial to speak or write in the imperial tongue is to call forth a problem of identity (Williams, 1997:193). Achebe exploited English to express himself for greater audience. He refashioned it by a blend with indigenous languages. The use of *ou* in *neighbours* suggests a tone other than American English in *Civil Peace*. Also, the voices of the thieves offer a very specific African dialect. This language, as well as carefully placed vocabulary such as *akara* and *demijohn*, shows the refashioned of the language.

Achebe uses English as his medium because he wants to communicate African experience to the world at large in a language that is widely understood and respected in international circles. He tries to construct an image of Africa in a language that respects the national traditions of his native land, while at the same time he recognizes the demands of a cosmopolitan, international audience to whom all of his work is partly addressed.

Therefore, Achebe has a dual mission to educate both African and European readers to reinstall a sense of pride in African cultures and:

“...to help my society to regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of years of denigration and self-abasement. Achebe has articulated the responsibility of the writer as an essentially pedagogical one in which the writer in addition to writing about the issues of his day also has to assume the role of “teacher” and guardian of his society” (Hussain, 2010).

In *Civil Peace* he shares the African people condition after war and how they struggle to survive. From the story, readers can get the image of African people, especially Nigerian. They had ever been colonized by the British Empire, then by their own nation brothers, but the impact was not always negatives. They still had spirit to reascent, build their own life and fight against different enemies, violence and corruption inside their own society.

The magic words “Nothing puzzles God” in *Civil Peace*, suggests an underlying religion and faith in the story. More than that, it shows Jonathan’s willingness to surrender himself and to leave his fate in the hands of his God. In robbery scene, after the robbers take the money life goes on as usual for Jonathan because nothing puzzles God, which means that the robbery has a greater meaning than how it seemed in God’s eyes. This explains African people faith; it is part of positive side of colonization that introduces them with God besides their traditional belief in gods. Thus, *Civil Peace* provides the religious aspect of African people as part of the effect of colonization.

The theme of conflict that drives Achebe’s stories providing support to the plot to develop is the conflict between two widely detached traditions of African and European origin. *Civil Peace* presents the traditions of African through their suffering and how they struggle with hard work, especially by exploring their resources, such as picking mangoes and making *akara*. The sentence “Nothing puzzles God” represents the faith that is brought by the colonizer, then being adopted by African people.

Achebe lives in Igbo tradition and Christian background. It influences his writing of *Civil Peace*. The rise and fall of a hero has new meanings in Achebe’s writings that are deeply absorbed in the cultural nationalism of Africa. The vitality of African traditions and their impact on African society under the stress of alien cultures is made amply visible in the story. Achebe believes that his goals cannot be realized by simply returning to a pre-colonial African age (Hussain, 2010).

He believes that African society has been irrevocably changed by the colonial era. Achebe represents a modern Africa whose ethnic and cultural diversity is complicated by the impact of European colonialism. He is even more disturbed to see African themselves internalize these stereotypes, lose confidence and turn away from their culture to emulate the so-called superior white European civilization (Hussain, 2010).



According to Encarta Encyclopedia 2007, “Wealth and power are distributed very unevenly in Nigerian society. The great majority of Nigerians, preoccupied with daily struggles to earn a living, have few material possessions and little chance of improving their lot”. Nigerian society is very accurately depicted in Achebe’s *Civil Peace* where readers find corrupting influence of external intrusion into Nigerian society at its worst; it is captured in the robbery as the climax.

In Anglophone writings of Africa in Nigeria are presented rich people, leaders, chiefs, politicians, and high-ranking civil servants often accumulate and flaunt wealth (Weber, 2010). On the other hand such unsocial behavior by these upstarts is expected and accepted by the society. At times corruption holds sway. These corrupt elite maintain their power through bribery, coercion and patronage depending upon the dictates of the situation.

As in most third world countries, in Nigeria politicians depend upon the political support of common people whom they exploit after coming into power. Achebe, who takes position as social critic writer, gives concern to that phenomenon. The oppressor and the oppressed are move into their internal society, based on their social class and power towards society. Soldiers and robbers that Jonathan Iwegbu deals with in *Civil Peace*, represent as the oppressor, and he as the oppressed. He and his family becomes the victim of Civil War and the robbery. The colonizer or the oppressor is more to someone who has power, not only someone but also country with different form of colonization. It is not using soldiers and weapons but absurd identity that brings ideology to gain power and control the world.

## E. CONCLUSION

*Civil Peace* is not written in vacuum, but influence by the historical event at that time, the Nigerian Civil War. It explains people conditions after civil war which is not depicted in *History*. It proves that new historicism can talk about reflection of many *histories* not *History*. Achebe portrays the dynamic *history* of the text which is captured in *Civil Peace* by showing the Nigerian social condition and how they struggle to survive after Civil War. Jonathan Iwegbu as the main character represents the Nigerian at that time, which cannot be found in *History*.

Moreover, postcolonial criticism reveals the African position and their tradition that influenced by British Empire colonization. The positive and negative effect of colonization is portrayed in *Civil Peace*. The faith is brought by the colonizer, then being adopted by African people. Achebe lives in Igbo tradition and Christian background. It influences his writing of *Civil Peace*. The oppressor

and the oppressed are move into their internal society, based on their social class and power towards society.

Nothing is perfect; there is always good and bad side of certain matter. How people get advantage will depend on their perspective to understand the influence of colonization. In this analysis, new historicism and postcolonialism complete each other to build better understanding on this beautiful short story. Understanding the *Civil Peace* as part of the *history*, the deeper meaning of the story can be improved. It is proven that history can be told by the common people as the part of the *History*. It gives new horizon in understanding literary text in relation with non-literary text, and improves the understanding on literary criticism.

This short story through new historical criticism represents the *History* through part of many *histories* which is written in fiction. History with noncapital letter *h*, speaks clearly about the society's condition which cannot be recorded in *History* with capital *H*. Readers can get wider information about the historical event in certain country through certain literary texts. Postcolonial criticism supports new historical criticism in this analysis. It reveals the relation between the colonizer and the colonized, and also its impact which are captured in *history*.

The main point that connects both criticisms is power. New historicism sees power as the controller of *history* and *History*, Jonathan Iwegbu experiences cannot be part of *History* but they explain more about *History* through *history*. The power of common people to participate to build history reflects in this approach. Power from postcolonialism can be seen through the role of the colonizer and the colonized, and it brings into wider understanding about colonization which appears in *Civil Peace*, because the colonizer is not only the British Empire but also the different tribes who live together in that country.

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